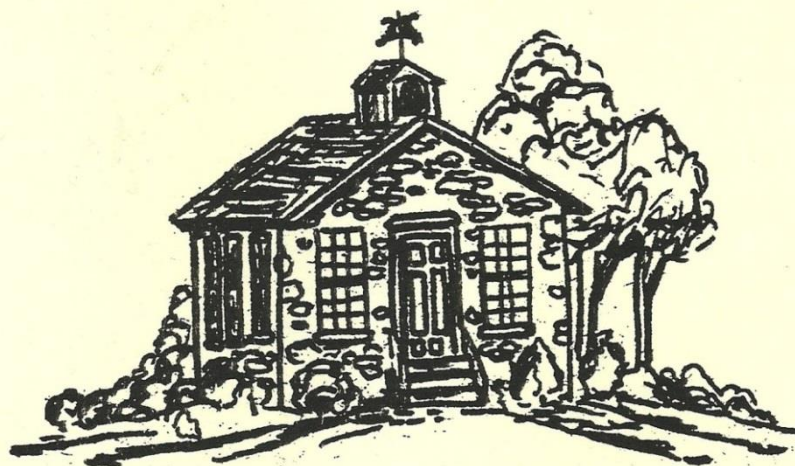




SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

*There
Was a
Time When*



A book of interviews



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

This book is dedicated to the people who gave
of their time and knowledge.....so that
we might grow.

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These interviews were conducted simultaneously with an archaeological dig at the Solebury one-room school house by the fifth and sixth grade Social Studies Enrichment students of New Hope-Solebury Elementary School in the 1981—1982 school year.

We would like to thank the people who helped us with this book.

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SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

INTERVIEWS

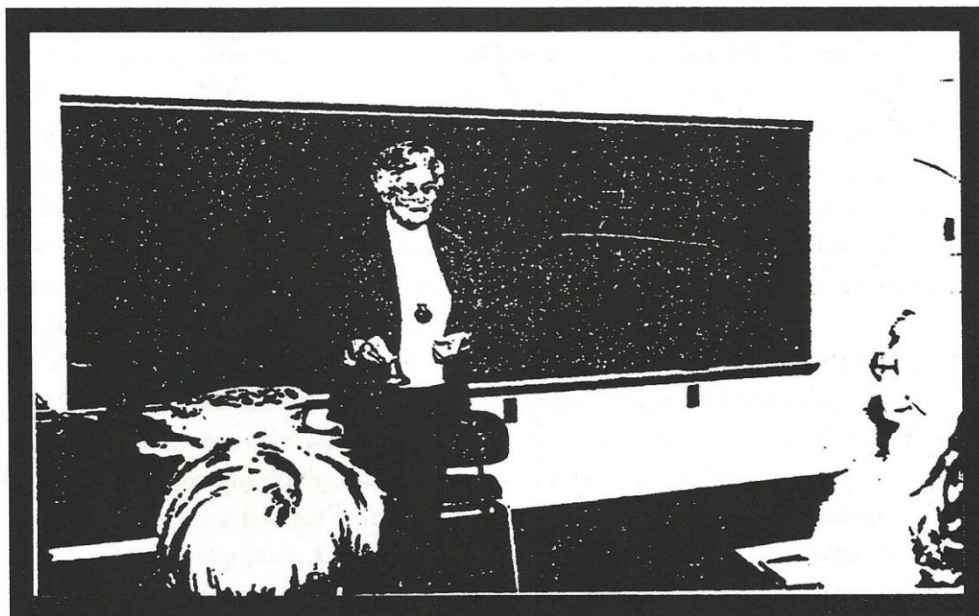
MRS. CATHERS	5
MR. FOX	13
MRS. GOSS	19
MRS. HIBBARD	26
MRS.. PRITCHARD	32
MRS. WALLWORK	41
MR. WALLWORK	51



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Mrs Cathers



In a presentation that was given
to the fifth and sixth grade
Social Studies Enrichment classes.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Mrs. Catthers

I started school in Brownsburg. That's been a long Time ago, and that was about 1909. From Brownsburg, I went to school at Green Hill. Green Hill School is now a residence, and it's near Lumberville. Well, that was a two room school. There was a room above, where the younger children were. I had a teacher whom the children all called Miss Nellie, and I have a photograph of the school when I attended there. Miss Nellie was very firm, but everybody loved her. Now, the school itself was like the little stone school here. Most of the schools in Solebury Township had the same equipment. For instance, I remember a map case. There was a metal case that would close, and when there was a teaching experience, the teacher would push up the lid of the case and the maps would be pulled down. And a map case like that was in every school; and a big dictionary, Webster dictionary, on the window sill. Most of the schools had deep window sills. And then, of course, there was no sanitation. You had to go to the bathroom in an outside toilet. And there was no electricity, so dark days it was difficult, as I remember. And no candles, no oil lamps. There was no well, so to speak; the water had to be carried, and I remember, when I was teaching, it was a special privilege to carry the water, because children like to get out of the classroom and take a walk, especially during the nice time of the year. Sometimes the boys would be sure to have a frog get in the water, and they'd bring it back and look so surprised to see the frog there. Of course, I had to send it back again. This went on until I knew what they were doing, but I thought maybe they needed a little extra walk. But, getting back to where I went to school - at the little stone school, here, I graduated from 8th grade. I had been attending Green Hill school, and my parents moved to the Christmas tree farm, the Crooks farm on 263. I walked back and forth; we all walked. There was no transportation. The weather was very bad -- snow storms. There were no school holidays, as far as the snow was concerned. One week every year, in the fall, teachers went to what they called a teacher's institute, in Doylestown. There were speakers, and then the teachers came back with new materials and interesting things for children. However, the equipment in each school was very scarce. When I started, everyone worked with slates, and I'm not sure what year they started to use paper. And I started to tell you about getting the water, especially getting the drinking water for the little stone school. The family next to the school was a family by the name of Preston. They had a well outside, with a pump, and so it was a very short distance to get the water. We didn't. have cups, we just all drank from the same cup, which would horrify people today. And nobody seemed to get sick. And, of course, heating - -



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

there was a stove in the center of the room. Later, when I taught (I also taught in that little stone school) then there was a stove with a jacket, a protector, so the heat would be sent around the room in a different manner. When you were near the stove, you were very warm, but the children who sat on the outside really were cold. And, of course, the desks were double desks, screwed to the floor; you couldn't move them. There were, I imagine, about forty children. I was in the 8th grade when I moved from Lumberville over to Solebury, and I think there were about ten children in that 8th grade class. There were no kindergarten classes. I think I started to school probably when I was almost six years old. At the end of the 8th grade, you took what they called a County examination. You were examined in all of the subjects that you'd been studying in the eight years that you went to school. I have a report card that I had when I went to school, and this was sent home by the teachers every month. It was graded in numbers, from a hundred down. I noticed I got a high number for my behavior. I think children in those days were very fearful of teachers because there was corporal punishment, that is, spanking and so forth. Much of the teaching was done from the blackboard. There were just a few minutes between classes. Each class would come forward to the front of the room and sit on a recitation bench or benches, depending on how many children were in the class. And they would recite what they had studied or the teacher would ask questions. But there was no teacher—pupil planning like there is today. It took the whole day to hear the recitations in all the subject areas.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question.: So that's how the children were tested? They couldn't take a written test?

Mrs. C.: I don't remember any way they could do that. It was just their class work that was graded. I don't remember any tests except this 8th grade test, which was held at the various schools, because when I was attending 8th grade, there were many schools that were open at that time. They hadn't closed the little one room schools. They were written tests, and we were allowed paper at that time. You could have your work erased on a slate. You'd be very careful getting all this done, and someone could turn around and just rub the elbow on the slate and the work would be spoiled. And you know, of course, that was done in some instances.

Question: How long were you teaching at the school here?

Mrs. C.: Well, I started teaching at Carversville in the two room school, and I taught there from 1922. I was allowed to teach at eighteen years old, right out of high school. So I came after the first world war, and teachers were very scarce. So I was there from 1922 to 1938. And then I had a maternal leave because I was expecting a baby. The school board gave me a year to stay home. Then I came over here in 1939, and I taught until 1940. Then I had another baby, so I stayed home again. So there were two years, actually, that I don't count in the 45 years I taught. And so, then, I was principal in 1954. So actually, I wasn't teaching from 1954 on, but I was in the school system. I retired in 1969.

Question: Was that a free school, a public school, or did you have to pay to get in?

Mrs. C.: No, I always taught at a public school. I think it's been a free school since it was established, but you might have to do some research on that.

Question: What was the name of that Carversville school?

Mrs. C.: Well, they just called it Carversville Primary and Carversville Grammar School. I had the first four grades, and I want to tell you something about the first four grades. I had to go to school right out of high school for ten weeks. I had to go to West Chester (West Chester is now a college). It was called a normal school because there were two years that you were certified to teach. I wanted to teach the upper grades, grades five, six, seven, eight. My girl friend went with me, and she wanted to teach the lower grades. So, when we got our contracts (each teacher got a contract every year) when my contract came, lo and behold, I was assigned to the lower grades and my girl friend was assigned to the upper grades. And we were so shy, and didn't want to ask a lot of questions, so we accepted it. We never said a word about it, we just went ahead and did the teaching. And all our plans had been made for the other class, so that was sort of strange. But it worked out.

Question: Is it true that if you were bad you had to sit in a corner with a dunce cap on?

Mrs. C.: Well, no, I never did that. And I don't remember children being punished that way. I think some of them would have liked it. I guess that's the reason I never did it when I taught school. I sort of liked to take care of it right there.

Question: Could you send them home if they were bad?

Mrs. C.: I never sent a child home. I just thought if they came to me, it was my job to do something about it. I wasn't very good at giving up. I usually could win.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Question: Would you have been able to do that if you wanted to, though?

Mrs. C.: Oh yes, I think some of them would love to have been sent home, to get away from me. In fact, one little boy, one time, didn't have his work done at recess time, and I had said that no one goes to play unless the work is finished. And he was tricky, he started to walk out with the rest of them. I said, "You can't go". And he said, "I don't like you". I said, "Well, I don't blame you. You know, if I were you, I wouldn't like me either. Now, you just work hard and get away from me". But I never sent children home, even when I was principal. If they were sick, that was different, but not for punishment, because I think it's important that the teacher take care of it, and I think teachers can. I felt the worst children always need loving the most. When I was principal, if a teacher would send a child down to me, I said, "There are two things - you either need a loving or a spanking. Now, which do you want"? And most of the time they wanted the loving. Because lots of them, I think, when they got real perky, they just needed some love. I've called parents and asked permission to spank. And, as soon as the parent would say yes, I didn't have to do it, 'cause they're liable to get one when they get home. When I started teaching school, I had a lot of children whose parents didn't speak English. I had families . . . Lojeski, Farbotnik, Matuski, Zelerievich. I had a lot of children whose parents didn't speak English, and those parents would say, "You listen to the teacher or you get punished when you get home". So, I really had a good school.

Question: What was the landscape like around the school?

Mrs. C.: The playground was very rough, and it wasn't graded.

Question: Where did they have recess here?

Mrs. C.: It was just the area you have around the stone school. Over that little grade, past the flag pole, down there. That was the boundary line, in back of that building. That's all the larger it was.

Question: How much was your pay?

Mrs. C.: Oh, when I started teaching school, it was \$85 a month. And there were nine months in the year, so I didn't get very much. But then, everything else was cheaper. In fact, I did a little research on the BiCentennial book, and teachers' stories were in that. In Chester County, there was a teacher who paid two dollars and a half for board and room from Monday to Friday. And her salary was 340 a month; that was 1909. When I started, in 1922, a teacher who taught at Stoney Hill School, Mrs. Fetterolf, was paid \$95 a month.

Question: What happened if someone got sick in school?

Mrs. C.: If someone got sick, well, you just took a chance. You had to walk home. I suppose that perhaps the older ones would walk with the younger ones. I just never got sick in school, but I think that must have happened. I don't remember children getting sick too much. We were a healthy bunch, I guess. I remember, I liked to work on the farm, I liked to help my father. So, one morning, I had a terrible headache and I felt very bad because I knew he was going to pick corn up in the field. We had to pick it with a horse and wagon, and so forth. And as soon as it came nine o'clock, and the bell rang, I felt better. So my mother said nothing that day, and I went and helped my father all day, and I loved it. Next day I had another headache, and she said, "You'll feel better when you go to school". So, she was on to my trick, so I went to school. I didn't like going to school either, by the way, but I was in a long time. You can get to like it.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Question: What if the teacher got sick?

Mrs. C.: Well, there were substitutes. But if you felt ill at school, I guess you had to wait til the end of the day. I don't remember any changing teachers, because the teacher really lived in a community most of the time, unless she was fortunate enough to have somebody bring her every day.

Question: What was the means of transportation?

Mrs. C.: Well, there really wasn't any bus when I was going to school. But I remember, if it was very snowy, my father used to bring us with the horse and sleigh. And if it was very rainy, well then he would drive us to school, if it was a continuous rain and if he wasn't too busy on the farm. A farmer gets very busy. Of course, winter time, he isn't busy in the fields. So they had to depend on horse and bridle. The first year I taught school, I walked from Solebury to Carversville, back and forth, every day. And the second year, I had a little bronco. Now, I was telling somebody about a bronco, and they thought it was an automobile. This was a horse, and I rode him back and forth to Carversville, the second and third year I lived up there.

Question: How was trash disposed of?

Mrs. C.: We didn't have an incinerator. When I went to school, there wasn't that much paper, because we had slates and slate pencils, but later, when there was the chance to use paper, I think we saved it and used it to start the fire in the stove, the kindling logs. We used coal. In the little stone school, the coal cellar was underneath, and there was a stairway, and the boys used to bring it up in buckets.

Question: Would someone be assigned to bring up coal?

Mrs. C.: There was no special assignment, but the teacher would appoint some one to do that. And, as I told you before, the boys especially liked these errands, because all day long you did a lot of sitting. And the classroom had to be quiet; there wasn't the talking, the visiting, the little conferencing like you had with units you were working with.

Question: What did they do to eat? Did they bring food?

Mrs. C.: Yes. I don't think the boys brought baskets, but the girls brought baskets, and boys usually had what they called a lunch pail. It was a tin container with a lid that fastened. There was a little something you could pull at the top, like a little circle, and it was a lunch pail made of tin. Now, I was thinking the other day, what did my mother wrap the sandwich in? I remember she made things, she made bread, she made cake. Some of the children who had store cakes, especially those little iced Mary Anns, they used to want my cake. They'd want to trade, because my mother made the cake herself, and I guess their mother was probably too busy to send it. I don't remember fruit in the lunch box. She must have wrapped it in a cloth napkin, I think, I don't remember wax paper or cellophane, or those little baggies. None of that.

Question: What kinds of things did they do to get punished?

Mrs. C.: Well, no one was eager to do anything to get punished. You'd get your report card every month, and I think parents were very strict. I know, my father and mother would have been most unhappy if I had not had a good mark in — they called it "behavior". And I had great respect for my parents and for the teacher, and I didn't do anything to get punished. I knew the rules; you have to learn the rules.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Question: On pleasant days, did you ever have parties?

Mrs. C.: Well, I taught school, but I don't remember parties when I went to school. The teacher was very busy. But I liked to give parties for my children because they were all so good. We had Valentine day parties and all kinds of holiday parties, and we used to make ice cream in the classroom, and they'd always like that.

Question: What did you do on rainy days?

Mrs. C.: I thought maybe somebody would ask me what happened on a rainy day, because we usually had an hour lunch, and they played outside on good days. But on rainy days, the teacher would conduct a spelling bee. I wasn't too good a speller. I always felt very self conscious about it, but that took up a lot of the noon time. And outside, boys played marbles. And then, the boys who would win would have a chance to go to Doylestown to a tournament. So we did like that. And I always took my fourth grade to the movies, because a lot of children never got to the movies.

Question: Were there special subjects, like art?

Mrs. C.: Only if the teacher had a talent for teaching it. Otherwise you had books, all kinds of plan books, when I was teaching. You didn't have a special teacher come in. There were no special teachers, none at all. If they were fortunate enough to have an organ, then the teacher would play the organ. But many of the teachers didn't play, so there was very little music, and very little art, so to speak.

Question: You said that you didn't get any school holidays.

Mrs. C.: Well, yes, Christmas and Thanksgiving, but no extra days. I think we went to school the day after Thanksgiving and we went to school, probably, the day after Christmas. Because we were out early in the year, in May sometime. The boys, especially, had to help their parents on the farm. Boys had to work on the farm, and so the parents didn't want the school to continue too long.

Question: What kind of clothes did you wear?

Mrs. C.: Well, I remember wearing long underwear in cold weather, and I wasn't small, and I really always felt, you know, so buxom. It was mostly wool in the winter. I remember wearing jumpers with blouses. When I was teaching school, I never saw sneakers. I don't remember ever seeing sneakers when I was in the school at all. But now it's the thing. They used to wear what they called boots. They were felt at the top, very cumbersome, with a sort of a rubber foot at the bottom. It would be wet-proof. It was very cumbersome for the children all day long to sit with those boots on. It must have been uncomfortable, but nobody complained. It wasn't an era of complaining.

Question: Did you have assigned seats?

Mrs. C.: Yes. And I think some were larger than the others. They tried to fit them, but they weren't adjustable, so you could be having the wrong desk many times, for posture. The desk back had a seat, and so they were really packed in. The children were really packed very close to each other.

Question: Did anyone go barefoot?

Mrs. C.: I don't recall any. I know they had years before, in the good weather, but not the children that came to me in 1922. The floors were rough, and it would be dangerous because you could be splintered.



SOLEBURY TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAUDE CATHERS

Question: When the Depression came, how many schools were forced to close?

Mrs. C.: I don't think they closed too much during the Depression. The enrollment became very low, and that forced consolidation.